



[4301-W7-P]

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Indian Affairs

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Intent to Prepare an Environmental Impact Statement for the Snow Mountain Solar Project on the Las Vegas Paiute Indian Reservation, Clark County, Nevada.

AGENCY: Bureau of Indian Affairs, Interior.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: In order to comply with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), as lead agency in cooperation with the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe (Tribe), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and other Federal agencies, intend to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) that will evaluate a proposed photovoltaic (PV) solar energy generation project on the Las Vegas Paiute Indian Reservation and a transmission line located on tribal lands, private lands and/or Federal lands administered and managed by BLM in Clark County, Nevada.

This notice announces the beginning of the scoping process to solicit public comments and identify potential issues related to the EIS. It also announces that public scoping meetings will be held in Nevada to identify potential issues, alternatives, and mitigation to be considered in the EIS.

DATES: The date and location of the public scoping meeting will be published in the *Las Vegas Sun* and *Las Vegas Review-Journal* at least 15 days before the scoping meeting. Written comments on the scope of the EIS or implementation of the proposal must arrive by [Insert date 30 days after date of publication in the FEDERAL REGISTER].

ADDRESSES: You may mail, email, or hand carry written comments to either Mr. Paul Schlafly, Natural Resource Specialist, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Southern Paiute Agency, 180 North 200 East, Suite 111, P.O. Box 720, St. George, Utah 84770; telephone: (435) 674-9720; email: *paul.schlafly@bia.gov*, or Mr. Chip Lewis, BIA Western Regional Office, 2600 North Central Avenue, 4th Floor Mailroom, Phoenix, Arizona 85004; telephone: (602) 379-6782; email: *chip.lewis@bia.gov*.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The proposed Federal action, taken under 25 U.S.C. 415, is BIA's approval of a solar energy ground lease and associated agreements entered into by the Las Vegas Paiute Tribe with a subsidiary of First Solar, Inc. (First Solar) to provide for construction and operation of an up-to 100 megawatt (MW) alternating current solar photovoltaic (PV) electricity generation facility located entirely on the Las Vegas Paiute Snow Mountain Reservation and specifically on lands held in trust by the United States for the Tribe. The Project would interconnect to an adjacent substation via a short 138 kilovolt or 230 kilovolt (kV) line that may be located on Tribal lands, private lands and/or Federal lands administered and managed by BLM. First Solar has accordingly requested that the BIA and BLM additionally approve right-of-ways (ROWs) authorizing the construction and operation of the transmission line. Together, the proposed solar energy facility, transmission line, and other associated facilities will make up the proposed Snow Mountain Solar Project (Project).

The Project would be located in Township 18 South, Range 59 East, Sections 34, 35, and 36 Mount Diablo Meridian, Nevada, and access to the Project would be provided by US Highway 95, Paiute Drive, and/or an upgrade to an existing road that crosses next to the proposed Project site. The generation facility would generate electricity using First

Solar's solar PV panels. Also included would be inverters, a collection system, an on-site substation to step-up the voltage to transmission-level voltage at 138 or 230kV, an operations and maintenance building, and other related facilities. A short single overhead 138 or 230 kV generation-tie transmission line would connect the solar project to the adjacent Northwest Substation.

Construction of the Project is expected to take approximately 12 to 15 months. First Solar is expected to operate the energy facility for 30 years, with two options to renew the lease for an additional 10 years, if mutually acceptable to the Tribe and First Solar. The Project is expected to be built in one phase of up to 100 MW, per the demand of potential off-takers or utilities. During construction, the PV panels will be placed on top of fixed-tilt and/or single-axis tracking mounting systems that are set on steel posts embedded in the ground. Other foundation design techniques may be used depending on the site topography and conditions. No water will be used to generate electricity during operations. Water will be needed during construction for dust control and a minimal amount will be needed during operations for administrative and sanitary water use on-site. The water supply required for the Project would be leased from the Tribe and the EIS will consider the impacts of alternative sources and delivery methods.

The purposes of the proposed actions are to: (1) help to provide long-term, diverse, and viable economic revenue base and job opportunities for the Tribe; (2) help Nevada and neighboring States to meet their State renewable energy needs; and (3) allow the Tribe, in partnership with First Solar, to optimize the use of the lease site while maximizing the potential economic benefit to the Tribe.

The BIA will prepare the EIS in cooperation with the Tribe, BLM, and possibly the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Defense (DOD). In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will provide input on the analysis. The resulting EIS will aim to:

- (1) provide agency decision makers, the Tribe, and the general public with a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of the proposed Project and alternatives on the Reservation;
- (2) describe the cumulative impacts of increased development on the Reservation;
- and (3) identify and propose mitigation measures that would minimize or prevent significant adverse impacts.

Consistent with these objectives, the EIS will analyze the proposed Project and appurtenant features, viable alternatives including other interconnection options, modified footprint alternatives, alternate routing for Project ROWs, and the No Action alternative. Other alternatives may be identified in response to issues raised during the scoping process.

The EIS will provide a framework for BIA and BLM to make determinations and to decide whether to take the aforementioned Federal actions. In addition, BIA will use and coordinate the NEPA commenting process to satisfy its obligations under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 U.S.C. 470f) as provided for in 36 C.F.R. 800.2(d)(3). Tribal consultations will be conducted in accordance with policy and tribal concerns will be given due consideration, including impacts on Indian trust assets. Other Federal agencies may rely on the EIS to make decisions under their authority and the Tribe may also use the EIS to make decisions. The USFWS will review the EIS for consistency with the Endangered Species Act, as amended, and other

implementing acts, and may rely on the EIS to support its decisions and opinions regarding the Project's impact on federally listed species.

Issues to be covered during the scoping process may include, but would not be limited to, Project impacts on air quality, geology and soils, surface and groundwater resources, biological resources, threatened and endangered species, cultural resources, socioeconomic conditions, land use, aesthetics, environmental justice, and Indian trust resources. In addition to those already identified above, other Federal, State, and local agencies, along with other stakeholders that may be interested or affected by the BIA's decision on the proposed Project, are invited to participate in the scoping process.

Submission of Public Comments

Please include your name, return address, and the caption "EIS, Snow Mountain Solar Project," on the first page of any written comments. You may also submit comments at the public scoping meeting.

A public scoping meeting will be held on the Reservation to further describe the Project and identify potential issues and alternatives to be considered in the EIS. The date of the public scoping meeting will be included in notices to be posted in the *Las Vegas Sun* and *Las Vegas Review-Journal* at least 15 days before the meeting.

Public Comment Availability

Comments, including names and addresses of respondents, will be available for public review at the mailing address shown in the **ADDRESSES** section during regular business hours, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, except holidays. Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in

your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time.

Authority

This notice is published in accordance with 40 CFR 1501.7 of the Council of Environmental Quality regulations and 43 CFR 46.235 of the Department of the Interior Regulations implementing the procedural requirements of the NEPA (42 U.S.C. 4321 *et seq.*), and in accordance with the exercise of authority delegated to the Assistant Secretary-Indian Affairs by part 209 of the Department Manual.

Dated: November 10, 2014.

Kevin K. Washburn,
Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs.